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REVIEW OF THE UNFPA EVALUATION POLICY

Summary

Through its decision 2009/18, adopted at the annual session 2009, the Executive Board approved the UNFPA evaluation policy and, inter alia, requested the Executive Director to submit a review of the evaluation policy at the annual session 2012 of the Executive Board. The UNFPA Executive Director requested the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an independent review of the UNFPA evaluation policy. The OIOS report entitled *Review of the evaluation policy of the United Nations Population Fund* is attached. The management response is posted separately on the UNFPA website.

It should be noted that when the Executive Board took a decision to reduce the two-week annual session 2012 to one week, the Board decided to move the agenda item on Evaluation, among others, from the annual session 2012 to the second regular session 2012. Meanwhile, UNFPA organized two informal consultations with the members of the Executive Board on 2 May 2012 and 12 June 2012, at which OIOS made presentations on the review of the evaluation policy, including discussing the terms of reference for the review. In addition, the Executive Board held a joint UNDP/UNFPA informal consultation on evaluation at the annual session 2012.

The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report on the review of the UNFPA evaluation policy and provide guidance.

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Office of Internal Oversight Services

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Review of the Evaluation Policy of the United Nations Population Fund

31 July 2012

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The evaluation policy of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was finalized in 2009 (DP/FPA/2009/4). A review of that policy was called for both by the policy itself (in paragraph 21) and by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/UNFPA Executive Board (decision 2009/18), which requested the Executive Director to submit the review at its 2012 annual session. Subsequently, the Executive Board moved the agenda item on evaluation to the second regular session 2012. Meanwhile, the Board held a joint UNDP/UNFPA informal consultation on evaluation at the annual session 2012.

2. In response to decision 2009/18, the Executive Director asked the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake the review. The Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) of OIOS conducted the review. This report presents the results of the review.

3. The objective of this review was to assess the UNFPA evaluation policy to determine its organizational relevance and the adequacy of its design, with a view towards recommending any possible amendments to enhance its overall effectiveness. While the review did not directly assess implementation of the policy, some implementation issues that arose during the course of the review have been included in this report.

II. METHODOLOGY

4. OIOS undertook this review from May to June 2012, using the following three data collection methods:

i. Interviews with: 12 UNFPA staff in New York Headquarters; two Monitoring and Evaluation Advisers in the regional offices for Africa and Asia and Pacific; four Monitoring and Evaluation Officers in four country offices; three Executive Board members (including the President and one Vice-President); and a representative of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID).

ii. A comprehensive document review of prior evaluation reports; internal memoranda and email communications; relevant Executive Board decisions; UNFPA policies and guidelines; and other relevant assessments.

iii. A benchmarking exercise to compare the UNFPA evaluation policy against the norms and standards for evaluation of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN-Women, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

III. BACKGROUND

5. In June 2009, UNFPA adopted its first evaluation policy following the approval by the Executive Board. The purpose of the policy is to "establish a common institutional basis for the

UNFPA evaluation function and enhance the quality of evaluations. The policy will contribute to ensuring the independence of the evaluation function and will guide the conduct of evaluations for organizational learning, management for results, and accountability".[1] In addition, the policy intended specifically to: (a) increase the use of results in decision-making by management; (b) improve programme effectiveness; (c) strengthen national evaluation capacity; (d) contribute to the systematic utilization of evaluation findings, and (e) support organizational learning.

6. The policy defined an overarching framework for guiding UNFPA evaluations. It specified UNFPA evaluations in two broad categories: independent evaluation to be conducted by the Division of Oversight Services (DOS), in line with the UNFPA oversight policy and the UNFPA accountability framework, and decentralized evaluation to be managed by countries, regions, and headquarters, overseen by the Programme Division.

7. The evaluation policy additionally requested management to provide operational details of the overarching framework. Thus, the then Executive Director issued internal communications, which detailed the roles and responsibilities of the different UNFPA units with respect to addressing implementation of the policy, and specified requirements and expectations for programme evaluation in the organization.

IV. RESULTS

A. The UNFPA evaluation policy does not sufficiently discuss the role evaluation should play within the organization

8. General reference to the role of evaluation in UNFPA is made in both the UNFPA evaluation policy and Executive Board decision endorsing it. The current policy states "evaluation at UNFPA is a comprehensive function that reinforces accountability, oversight and learning in order to support management decisions and enhance programme effectiveness".[2] The policy further states that UNFPA adheres to the UNEG definition of evaluation as "an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme strategy, policy topic, theme, sector, operational areas, institutional performance.... An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into decision-making processes".[3] When the Executive Board endorsed the policy in 2009, it noted "the mandate of the evaluation function is to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of UNFPA programmes and results".[4]

9. However, the current policy does not provide a sufficiently clear explanation of the concept and role of evaluation within the specific UNFPA organizational context, as called for in the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation policies.[5] The policy is not explicitly linked to the mandates, goals and strategic priorities of the agency, which is critical to establishing the

[1] DP/FPA/2009/4, para. 1.
[2] DP/FPA/2009/4, Summary.
[3] DP/FPA/2009/4, para. 7.
[4] Decision 2009/18, para. 5.
[5] Standards for Evaluation in the UN System, Standard 1.2.

necessary framework for how the function will be structured and how evaluation results will be utilized. For example, the evaluation policies of UNDP and UNICEF outline and align the concept of evaluation to their specific organizational mandates and needs. The UNDP policy defines the purpose of evaluation as assessing UNDP impact on poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development of programme countries, while the UNICEF policy states that evaluation should analyze UNICEF contribution to global strategies in collaboration with key partners, particularly with regard to the achievement of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals.

10. Based on OIOS interviews, there is a general consensus on the role of evaluation in UNFPA among its internal and external stakeholders. However, the policy does not explicitly refer to this role in the Organization, which should include feeding into and informing the strategic direction and substance of country programmes; providing information on the UNFPA "footprint" left on the ground with beneficiaries; and providing cross-cutting assessments of critical programme priorities, such as maternal health.

11. A more explicit and detailed discussion that links evaluation with the UNFPA overall mandate, expected accomplishments and goals would facilitate strengthening evaluation activities by defining their intended contribution to improving programme results, providing greater clarity on expected achievements for evaluation within the Organization, and establishing a stronger foundation for its operationalization. In particular, the new 2014-2017 UNFPA strategic plan provides a timely opportunity for outlining the intended role and contribution of various types of evaluation within this highly relevant context.

B. The policy lacks clear delineation of scope between centralized and decentralized evaluation activities

12. The current evaluation policy refers to DOS as conducting *centralized* evaluation, and country offices, regional offices and divisions at headquarters as conducting *decentralized* evaluations; however, it does not clearly delineate their intended differences and complementarities, nor does it define their respective purposes, objectives and usefulness.

13. Centralized evaluation should have a broader scope – at the global, organization-wide level. It should be carried out independently from those responsible for programme operations and the results it seeks to evaluate. It should address organization-wide, crosscutting strategic issues of relevance to the entire organization. It should also independently assess the quality of decentralized evaluations and establish the criteria against which decentralized evaluation activities will be assessed in the organization. This function should be undertaken by DOS.

14. Decentralized evaluation should have a comparatively more narrow scope. It should be carried out at the field level, including in both country and regional offices, and should include a headquarters component to support and coordinate decentralized activities and to consolidate and report on results where appropriate. It should be embedded within programme operations, the results of which it seeks to evaluate. It should address issues of specific relevance and priority to

country and regional programming. This function should be led by the Programme Division and undertaken in the field offices.

C. The policy is not clear on segregation of evaluation roles and responsibilities

15. Following from the results above on the scope of centralized versus decentralized evaluation functions, there is a need for greater clarity in the policy with regard to the segregation of their respective roles and responsibilities. The imprecise text in the policy has contributed to confusion and varying interpretations at headquarters and amongst country and regional office monitoring and evaluation staff about which headquarters office (DOS or the Programme Division) was intended to lead certain tasks. Once clarified in the policy, senior staff from all affected offices should discuss and communicate their common agreement and interpretation regarding evaluation roles and responsibilities.

16. On a broad level, the policy states that "The Division for Oversight Services also provides oversight for all evaluations, including monitoring and assessing the quality of evaluations"; it also stipulates that "the Programme Division coordinates evaluation planning in UNFPA; fosters evaluation professionalism through advice, guidelines, training..."[6] Staff find it difficult to reconcile one office's responsibility for general oversight of evaluation with another office's being tasked with evaluation planning and professionalism. Internal communication on the policy issued by the then Executive Director states that DOS "provides inputs to guidelines" while the Programme Division "provides advice", and that DOS "provides inputs to the UNFPA biennial evaluation plan" while the Programme Division "coordinates Fund-wide annual and biennial evaluation plans". The resulting interpretations at a minimum have created internal debates over which office owns primary responsibility, but also may inappropriately affect the operational independence of DOS. Independent evaluation functions should provide guidance only for activities within their own mandate, and should decide independently how to prioritize and plan for these activities. The policy should outline appropriate consultations and interactions between the two offices to ensure overall evaluation objectives are met without affecting DOS' operational independence.

17. Among several examples where this lack of clarity has created inefficiencies and confusion, because DOS and the Programme Division provide different, somewhat conflicting messages, are the following:

- different evaluation guidelines, produced separately by DOS and the Programme Division, are being disseminated to regional and country offices;
- training sessions for field staff have been conducted separately by DOS and the Programme Division; and,
- reports on the evaluation functions have been undertaken by DOS and the Programme Division separately without consultation.

18. The current policy lacks sufficient clarity in the following specific areas:

[6] DP/FPA/2009/4, paras. 13 and 14 (c).

- *Quality assurance.* The policy gives responsibility to DOS for assessing the quality of evaluations and to the Programme Division for fostering evaluation professionalism. However, evaluation quality is best achieved through a more comprehensive approach at both the centralized and decentralized levels that includes establishing appropriate criteria against which evaluation quality will be measured, disseminating those criteria, developing appropriate skills and capacity to meet them, and assigning roles for monitoring and assessing quality on both an ongoing and periodic basis.
- *Methodological guidance and technical advice.* As noted above, responsibility for providing methodological guidance and technical advice for decentralized evaluation in the organization is dispersed. While criteria for the centralized (independent) and decentralized (embedded) functions may differ, guidance and advice should be tailored to meet these separate needs and coordinated where appropriate to ensure consistency with the criteria being used to assess quality. The policy needs to be clarified in this regard.
- *Evaluation planning.* The policy gives responsibility for evaluation planning to the Programme Division, with internal communication from the then Executive Director clarifying that DOS provides input to the process. Evaluation planning should be coordinated, incorporating input from all relevant stakeholders. While planning for centralized and decentralized evaluation should be undertaken by those separately accountable, it should take into account appropriate sequencing and timing to enhance synergistic opportunities. While scope clarification noted above should contribute to avoiding duplication and unnecessary overlap, planning responsibilities need to be more appropriately clarified in the policy.
- *United Nations Evaluation Group representation.* The policy states the Programme Division "develops links with the United Nations Evaluation Group" while the follow-up internal communication states that DOS "represents UNFPA at UNEG".[7] While DOS is best placed to represent UNFPA in UNEG, the Programme Division could also benefit from participation in certain training activities and information sharing activities from UNEG meetings and work.

D. The evaluation policy has contributed to a disjointed and at times dysfunctional approach to evaluation within UNFPA

19. While the policy states that evaluation "is a comprehensive function", it does not outline an integrated approach, incorporating expected complementarity between the separate centralized and decentralized components. It instead outlines elements that, absent clear direction on implementation, have contributed to tension between the separate components. Evaluation in UNFPA therefore suffers from lack of a commonly understood vision – that is, clearly defined and well-understood roles that are seen to contribute collectively to improving the efficient implementation and results of programmes. The disjointed treatment of the separate components also creates communications challenges and hampers effective collaboration, contributing to inefficient duplication of efforts and conflicting messages, such as the examples noted above on

[7] DP/FPA/2009/4, para. 14 (c) and internal communications.

guidelines, training and reporting. The recent report *Quality Assessment of UNFPA Decentralized Country Programme Evaluations, 2012*, is another example of a disjointed approach in which DOS and the Programme Division did not agree on the appropriateness of standards and criteria to be applied, limiting the usefulness of the report as a consequence.

20. Within the current policy there is an inherent assumption that evaluation for accountability is the purview of the centralized function, while evaluation for learning is the purview of the decentralized function. However, evaluation for both accountability and learning can be appropriately undertaken by both functions, albeit with different emphases; for example, decentralized evaluation should monitor indicators of programme performance activities and outputs on an ongoing basis, while centralized evaluation should periodically assess the relevance of indicators used, the integrity of data collection activities, and progress towards achieving defined programme outcomes and impacts. Thus, an overall coordinated approach is needed to ensure a common understanding and use of each component of evaluation as tools that provide both assurance on programme performance as well as lessons for future programme design and implementation.

E. The current policy has critical gaps

21. The 2009 policy does not address several critical issues that are significant to ensuring an adequate and robust framework for evaluation activities. As recommended in the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation policies, and featured in the policies of other United Nation entities, they include the following:

- *Planning and prioritizing evaluation.* Specific guidelines should be provided on how evaluation workplan is prioritized so that the right evaluations are being conducted at the right times to ensure their timely contributions to improving efficient programme delivery and results. A more comprehensive work-planning framework that encompasses both centralized and decentralized evaluations would facilitate more strategic decisions on evaluation priorities. While resolving scoping issues between the separate components should contribute to eliminating unnecessary duplication, better coordination of evaluation planning would also help ensure the appropriate sequencing and complementarity of centralized and decentralized evaluations.
- *Evaluation resources.* The policy should support generally expected benchmarks for total evaluation resources – both human and financial – at the organizational, programme and project levels. Resource levels should support both adequate and sustainable evaluation and be measured at both the centralized and decentralized levels, understanding that particular project or programme requirements may require higher or lower levels of evaluation resource allocations based on particular factors such as complexity and strategic significance. Within the UNEG evaluation community, benchmarks range between 3 and 5 per cent of programme and/or project resources allocated for evaluation. UNFPA may want to examine evaluation expenditures for other United Nations entities for further benchmarks.
- *Follow-up procedures.* The policy should describe in greater detail specific evaluation follow-up mechanisms, disclosure policies and report dissemination procedures. It

should be explicit regarding how responses and timelines for implementing recommendations will be established, tracked and monitored; the timing and conditions under which evaluation reports will be publicly disclosed; and the manner in which evaluation results and reports will be disseminated, both internally and externally.

- *Incorporation of gender and human rights perspective.* The policy should refer to the need to ensure that gender and human rights perspectives are incorporated into planning and conducting UNFPA evaluations.
- *Knowledge management systems.* The policy should describe how lessons learned and good practices from both centralized and decentralized evaluations will be captured, stored, shared and utilized, not only with regard to the conduct of evaluations themselves, but especially within the context of programme design and implementation.
- *Country-specific programme needs.* The policy should acknowledge and recognize that UNFPA country programmes will appropriately vary with regard to strategic priorities, goals, political environment and operational challenges. The policy should allow for country-specific evaluation needs to be addressed at the decentralized level, and overseen by the Programme Division.

F. The policy is confusing on the issue of independence

22. One of the principles of the current policy is that of independence; it states "Evaluation at UNFPA will be carried out with the highest level of objectivity and impartiality. Centralized evaluations by the Division for Oversight Services achieve this through its structural independence from management... Decentralized evaluations will ensure objectivity and impartiality through a variety of mechanisms".[8]

23. However, the policy does not sufficiently describe the principle of independence as regards relevance and implementation. As referenced in an ongoing DFID review of the evaluation function in UNFPA, independence should be seen as existing along a continuum, incorporating three elements:

- structural, pertaining to the organizational positioning of the evaluation activity;
- functional, pertaining to independence in planning, resourcing, conducting and reporting on evaluation activities; and
- behavioural, pertaining to the competencies, actions and attitudes of individuals carrying out evaluation activities.

24. While the latter two are equally significant for both the centralized and decentralized functions, the first is more significant for the centralized function (in the context of UNFPA) led by DOS, which needs operational independence (reporting-wise), from those directly responsible for the management of programmes. That being said, those responsible for leading and directing the centralized evaluation function nevertheless need access to senior management, governance and leadership forums to ensure appropriate consideration of contextual and strategic priorities and operational challenges in order to demonstrate the relevance of evaluation activities. The embedded, decentralized functions, while benefiting from characteristics (including functional

[8] DP/FPA/2009/4, para. 11 (d).

and behavioural) that ensure the integrity and credibility of evaluations, need not be structurally independent of programme management.

25. Independence is thus a complex issue with multiple dimensions. The policy could benefit from recognition of this complexity, and explicitly take a position on how the need for and practice of independence applies in UNFPA in both the centralized and decentralized evaluation functions.

V. CONCLUSION

26. The 2009 UNFPA evaluation policy provides a general framework for evaluation based on a paradigm incorporating both centralized and decentralized evaluation. This paradigm, which meets most evaluation needs of the organization and is generally aligned with its structure, should therefore be continued, with DOS retaining the lead on independent, centralized evaluation activities, and the Programme Division leading the embedded, decentralized evaluation activities.

27. There are however opportunities to strengthen the policy with greater clarity and precision. The revised policy should be more explicit with regard to roles and responsibilities of the centralized and decentralized functions. In instances where responsibility is split between the two, such as methodological support, it is critical that there be strong coordination and collaboration between the two functions in areas where both are affected.

28. The policy should additionally discuss how the two functions are intended to work together by identifying the implementation tools and mechanisms, such as consultation and coordination requirements and standard procedures for sharing evaluation plans and draft reports, to facilitate more effective coordination.

29. Critical gaps in the policy should also be filled to make it more robust and align it with UNEG norms and standards for evaluation. The gaps that must be addressed are identified in paragraph 21. In this regard, UNFPA may wish to refer to the policies of similar United Nations entities in terms of size and operational delivery structure, as helpful comparators for strengthening and enhancing the UNFPA policy.

30. Furthermore, the policy should be revised taking into account the 2014-2017 UNFPA strategic plan, in order to ensure alignment between evaluation activities and organizational mandates, priorities and objectives.

31. Along with a revision of the policy, it would be helpful to conduct a mapping exercise of evaluation activities in UNFPA that would visually display the framework for evaluation, showing specific evaluation-related activities conducted, who conducts them, the timing or cycle of these activities, and how they are intended to be used.

32. Lastly, an evaluation champion to act on behalf of the Executive Director – who understands evaluation and can advocate for its importance and value added – is needed to

ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to evaluation in UNFPA. Critical evaluation activities, such as planning, establishing quality assessment criteria, and following up, need to be coordinated for the organization as a whole, so as to ensure they are not duplicated on parallel but separate tracks. The Executive Director of UNFPA may want to consider appointing one of his Deputy Directors to act on his behalf as that champion. This individual could also ensure coordination of functions that are split, such as evaluation planning, methodological guidance and technical support.

33. Having an evaluation champion will be critical to the successful implementation of a revised UNFPA evaluation policy. OIOS recommends that Deputy Director for Programme may be best placed to assume the role of champion.

VI. CRITICAL NEXT STEPS

34. UNFPA should revise the policy to:

- explicitly link the role of evaluation to the Organization's mandates and goals;
- address the gaps in the current policy;
- clarify roles and responsibilities between the centralized and decentralized functions; and
- define the tools and mechanisms that will be used to coordinate between the two functions.

35. Along with the revision of the policy, UNFPA should conduct a mapping exercise for the evaluation function as discussed in paragraph 31 above.

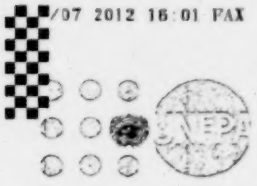
36. The Executive Director should appoint an evaluation champion in the Organization to advocate for and coordinate the centralized and decentralized evaluation functions.

37. Once the policy has been revised and the evaluation champion appointed, consideration should be given to organizing a facilitated discussion with representatives from the Executive Director's office, DOS, the Programme Division and regional offices, to discuss a plan for implementing the policy and ensuring common agreement and understanding of evaluation roles and responsibilities.

Annex I

In this Annex, OIOS presents the full text of comments received from UNFPA on the Review of Evaluation Policy of United Nations Population Fund. This practice has been instituted as per General Assembly resolution 54/263 following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee (IAAC). The comments from UNFPA on the draft have been incorporated as appropriate into this final report.

Comments from UNFPA on the draft report:



27 July 2012

Dear Ms. Lapointe,

Thank you for your memo of 24 July 2012, in response to a request made to us by our Executive Board, transmitting the ***Draft Report of the Review of Evaluation Policy of the United Nations Population Fund***.

As the report has pointed out, the results indicate critical gaps in the current policy that affect the way evaluations are implemented and applied across the organization. We have taken note of the issues and observations that you have raised, specifically in terms of the segregation of roles and responsibilities, the delineation of scope between centralized and decentralized evaluation activities and the issue of independence. I also acknowledge the critical next steps that you recommend in order to revise and strengthen the policy and take evaluation forward in UNFPA. I also wish to assure you that we will act on those recommendations, as appropriate.

I am optimistic that the results of the review will help us to improve the policy and also ensure the relevance and effectiveness of evaluation in our overall policy and programming efforts.

My office is currently putting together a management response to the report, as requested also by our Executive Board.

I look forward to receiving the final report as soon as possible.

Let me reiterate my gratitude to you and your team for this extremely valuable collaboration.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

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